

EMIGRATION AND RURAL IRELAND.

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The decline in population in Éire during the past hundred years from 6,950,000 to 2,950,000 (1943) has been accompanied by revolutionary changes in land distribution and tenure and also by striking developments in agricultural technique. There have been measures of social amelioration in rural areas, notably during the last fifty years, that have left a vivid mark on the landscape and raised the standard of living throughout the country. Whether this would have been possible without emigration, or with emigration on a less widespread scale, is a debatable point that need only draw the comment here that if the middle nineteenth century was a period of overpopulation in Éire it is not inconceivable that the middle twentieth century may be a period of underpopulation, at least in the rural areas. Special consideration will be given in this paper to the main agricultural developments that have been accompanied by heavy emigration, to the changing balance of rural and urban populations and to the present staffing of farms in Éire.

The rural and urban populations have fared very differently during the past hundred years. The town population, which has fluctuated around 1,000,000 and is now, with 1,085,000, only 15,000 less than in 1841, fell to 880,000 in 1891 when it was one-quarter of the whole as compared with two-fifths to-day. The increase since 1891 is most marked in Dublin and to a limited extent in Cork until 1936 at least, and in a few other towns, notably Galway, but it is not seen in the small market towns most closely associated with the rural areas.¹ Dublin became an area of net immigration between 1926 and 1936 but there were signs in 1936-1941 that the growth of Dublin was slackening and there were actual declines in Cork and Waterford between 1936 and 1943. It is therefore possible that the towns, far from being outlets for rural migrants, will themselves become centres of emigration and that the decade 1926-1936 will stand out in Irish population history as the only one in which the towns as a whole absorbed their natural increase of population and part of the emigrant stream from the rural areas.

The relative stability of the town population is offset by constant decline in the rural areas, from 5,429,000 in 1841 to 2,581,000 in 1891 (48 per cent. of 1841), to 1,914,000 in 1936 (35 per cent. of 1841) and 1,907,000 in 1941. In the 1941 Register of Population it was claimed that the decline in rural population, which was a feature of every Census

¹ Éire, *Census Reports*, esp. *General Reports*, 1926 and 1936; see also Freeman, T. W., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Dublin, vol. xvi, pp. 89-104, 1938-1939, and in *Geographical Review*, New York, vol. 29, pp. 507-508, 1939.

for a hundred years, was arrested, but probably two-thirds or more of the decrease of 42,000 in Éire's population between 1941 and 1943 must be ascribed to the rural areas, so it is difficult to accept the somewhat optimistic views of 1941 even though some of the emigrants now absent from the country will ultimately return.²

A survey of 1841-1941 shows two clearly marked periods with 1891 as a fairly reliable divide between them. The rural population declined by one-half between 1841 and 1891 and by one-quarter between 1891 and 1941, but the decrease over the whole century was very unevenly distributed in the country. Excluding the increase of 57 per cent. in Dublin city and county, only two counties, Louth and Kildare, have more than 50 per cent. of their 1841 population: Donegal, Cork, Wexford and Wicklow have 45-50 per cent., Limerick, Kerry and Mayo 40-45 per cent., and all the rest 30-40 per cent. It will be seen that the western districts, excluding Clare, did not lose as heavily as most of the Midlands and that some of the eastern counties showed a greater resistance to emigration than the Midlands, partly through urban developments and partly through the continued employment of labour on farms with some arable cropping. The decline in population over a century is very closely related to the changing emphasis in farming; where arable cropping has been almost entirely supplanted by stock grazing and fattening, as in Meath, the loss is high; where arable farming still remains significant, as in Donegal, Mayo and Kerry, the loss is less marked. But this adjustment was seen primarily before 1881 or 1891, since when the loss of population reflects a wide variety of local conditions and varying reactions to the possibilities of emigration.³ Those areas losing less heavily during the last fifty years include such diverse regions as parts, but only parts, of the Congested Districts, such as north-west Donegal and north-west Mayo, the creamery districts of Limerick and North Kerry, the grazing-fattening country of large farms in Meath and Kildare, and some areas in the Midlands.

The Use of Land in Éire, 1851-1941.

The land area of Éire is 17,000,000 acres, all of which, apart from a small fraction used for roads and railways or built over, and 2 per cent. in forests and woodlands, may be regarded as potential agricultural land. The fundamental distinction between rough pasture and improved land devoted to crops and pasture is clearly apparent in any landscape and quite obviously many poor fields are being allowed to revert to a rough state. This can hardly be attributed to emigration only as the area of rough pasture reached its minimum of 4,000,000 acres in 1872, at a time of particularly heavy emigration. Since then the area of rough pasture has increased steadily to a maximum of 5,500,000 acres in 1942: it gained at the expense of improved land during the war of 1914-1918 as well as during the present war. The increase of rough pasture is most marked in counties with a high proportion of mountainous land, such as Wicklow, Kerry, Mayo and Donegal, but a decrease is recorded from some primarily lowland counties such as Meath, Longford, Limerick and Roscommon, while the position has changed only to a slight extent,

² For 1941 and 1943 figures, see Éire, *Register of Population*, 1941, pub. Dublin, 1944, and *Irish Trade Journal and Statistical Bulletin*, Dublin, vol. xix, p. 59, 1944.

³ See especially the introduction by John Hooper to *Saorstát Éireann, Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926*, Dublin, 1930; also *Agricultural Statistics, 1927-1933*, Dublin, 1935, and the annual *Statistical Abstract of Éire*.

if at all, elsewhere. Most of the rough pasture is attached to farms and is useful grazing land for cattle and sheep. It would be easy to take too tragic a view of the continued increase of rough pasture, as much of it is definitely submarginal land that can only provide a precarious living for those who work it.⁴

The improved land has been variously allocated during the past hundred years between corn crops, potatoes and root crops, pasture, and meadow, but certain general trends may be discerned. Crops covered nearly 30 per cent. of the improved area in 1851, but only 14 per cent. in 1911; the stimulus to crop production in the 1914-1918 war proved short-lived and by 1931 the proportion of tilled land had fallen to a level of 12½ per cent. But official encouragement from 1933 was not without success and still greater efforts were urged in 1940, so that by 1941, 16 per cent. of the improved area was cropped, slightly more than half the arable acreage of 1851.⁵ This advance was made at the expense of pastures and meadows for, as already indicated, the total area of improved land was still declining. Certain crops were especially favoured, notably wheat, now grown on more land than in 1851 to provide bread for at least the greater part of the year. The home-grown wheat in the middle of the inter-war period would have kept the country in bread for three weeks of the year. Oats, with slightly more than half its 1851 acreage of 1,585,000, is now much less extensively grown than in 1918 but its position as a feedstuff in peacetime is menaced by the competition of maize meals: in 1939 it was grown on only 537,000 acres. Barley production had reached by 1942 a greater acreage (186,000) than in 1918 but its main destination is brewing and distilling. Corn crops as a whole are now more widely grown than in 1918 and their total acreage of 1,663,000 in 1943 and 1,776,600 in 1944 represents 70 per cent. and 75 per cent. respectively of the 1851 total.

Root crops are used both as foodstuffs and feedstuffs and they are grown on most farms in the country but especially on the very small holdings of the west where the farmers have to grow as great a proportion as possible of the food for their families and livestock because their cash resources are small. It is therefore not remarkable that the highest percentage of ploughed land should be found in such areas as Dunfinaghy r.d., and that the farmers of Meath devote nearly all their land to pasture and meadow. But the opinion is widely held that more land could profitably be given to root crops.⁶ However, it is important to distinguish the subsistence element from the modern commercial production of roots: a very high acreage of roots may mean that a poverty-stricken population are trying to keep themselves alive and straining to produce a minimum diet.⁷ That such conditions prevailed a hundred years ago is beyond question and it may be urged that a return to such conditions is undesirable. Of the individual crops, potatoes covered 660,000 acres in 1851 and 862,000 in 1861, after which there was a steady decline to 425,000 acres in 1911. A slight rise during the 1914-1918 war

⁴ See Clear, T., "Forestry," in *The Natural Resources of Ireland*, pp. 83-84, Royal Dublin Society, 1944. But the point is highly controversial and nothing more than a statement of fact is intended.

⁵ See sources listed under note 3 and the quarterly *Irish Trade Journal and Statistical Bulletin*. The 1944 figures are in vol. xix, p. 142, but are preliminary only.

⁶ Johnston, J., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvii, pp. 33-44, 1931, and O'Donovan, J., *The Economic History of Livestock in Ireland*, p. 435. Cork, 1940.

⁷ Salaman, R. N., *The Influence of the Potato on the course of Irish History*, Finlay Memorial Lecture, Dublin, 1943.

was followed by a drop to 317,000 acres in 1939 but since the beginning of the present war the area sown has been stabilised at about 420,000 acres. Turnips have been supplanted by mangels on the better soils: the former cover 146,000 acres and the latter 86,000 acres. Sugar beet growing has become important during the last twenty years, especially since 1933 and in 1942 the crop covered 55,000 acres. Cabbages, generally included with the root crops, reached their maximum development about 1900 with 40,000 acres but are now grown on only about half that area. The net result is that all these root and green crops now cover about three-quarters of the 1,072,000 acres given to them in 1851. Some special crops, such as mangels and sugar beet, have become more significant but those crops most associated with the poorer types of subsistence farming, such as potatoes and cabbage, have a less dominant position.

Hay and pastures are the main support of livestock in Irish farming and the area given to each increased steadily during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Pastures covered 7,435,000 acres in 1851 and increased to more than 9,000,000 acres by the end of the century but later fell to the 1851 level and even less—7,178,000 acres in 1942. Meadows have become steadily more prominent and their area has increased from 1,062,000 acres in 1851 to a peak of 2,313,000 acres in 1931, since when it has dropped to slightly less than 2,000,000 acres. Three trends are discernible here (1) the withdrawal of the poorer pastures from the category of improved land, which may mean much in some cases but little in others as the boundary between the two is difficult to draw; (2) some pastures at least have been turned into meadows or used for crops; (3) meadows, gaining at first from formerly-cropped land in the mid-nineteenth century, have played a vital part in the increasingly specialised livestock production of Éire but have lost some ground to arable crops during the past ten years. It is possible to feed cattle on grass or on a fodder crop grown in the same field and it is not unnatural that there should be some competition between the two. But the value of winter silage has been strongly urged at times and any considerable fall in the meadow acreage might be against the best agricultural interests of the country. In passing, it may be noted that the assessment of pastures should be qualitative rather than merely quantitative: it may be sound policy to grade up the good pastures and to allow the submarginal land to become rough pasture or to be reserved for forestry.

Land use in Éire reflects an agricultural economy in which mixed farming is the basis of specialised production of cattle, for stores and meat, with milk, butter, eggs, poultry and bacon. It is not, as in Denmark, based mainly on the provision of feedstuffs to carry animals through a long winter necessarily spent in stalls but rather on the use of pastures that can be grazed for at least the greater part of the year.⁸ The assessment of relative productivity through the years lies mainly in the livestock supported and the value of the food staples derived from them. In the past hundred years the yield per acre of feedstuffs has increased steadily and the number of cattle has almost doubled. There are now more than 4,000,000 cattle, against 2,327,000 in 1851, 2,693,000 sheep against less than 2,000,000 in 1851 and nearly 18,000,000 poultry as compared with less than 6,000,000 in 1851. Pigs are liable to sharp fluctuations and have been severely hit by feeding difficulties in the

⁸ Beddy, J. P., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvii, pp. 194-199, 1943-1944.

past few years, with the result that their number of 380,000 in 1944 is the lowest on record: more usually they number about 1,000,000.⁹ The general position is that Éire's agriculture, in spite of many fluctuations in fortune, has become much more productive than in 1851, partly owing to the development of creameries during the past sixty years in the main dairying areas, and partly to the integration of the cattle trade by which young animals gradually find their way to the final fattening grounds in Meath, Westmeath, Dublin and Kildare.¹⁰ The increase in the total cattle population is due to this dual development rather than to any marked change in the number of dairy cows, which has remained 1,200,000, half the total cattle of Éire in 1851 but less than one-third to-day. Nearly 40 per cent. of the total agricultural output was exported in 1939 against approximately 50 per cent. ten years earlier: the changed proportion is partly a reflection of the increased demands of the Irish home market.¹¹

Éire has been in many ways integrated into a single agricultural producing unit, or is in the process of such integration. One of its functions in the British market, shared with parts of Wales and Scotland, is to provide store cattle to replenish dairy herds and to stock fattening pastures. But the export trade is little more than the disposal of a surplus derived from the internal cattle trade and already the increased consumption in Éire, due mainly to the growing demands of the Dublin market, has begun to affect the volume of exports in the absence of any marked increase in the number of cattle. However, live animals accounted for approximately half the net export trade by value of Éire in 1939.¹² Butter production depends on creameries located mainly in two areas:¹³ (a) Cork, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Limerick and North Kerry and (b) a belt from Sligo to Monaghan, and factories located in the larger towns such as Cork and Limerick. The farmers' butter produced in areas remote from creameries, such as those near the western seaboard and in hilly districts throughout the country, finds its way to shops or to factories for processing but there are signs that branch creameries, or separating stations, will gradually bring the remoter milk supplies within the general commercial network of the creameries. The farmers of small holdings beyond the creamery areas rely mainly on the rearing of young store cattle and the sales of eggs, poultry and pigs. Sheep figure in the export trade, but are of quite subsidiary financial importance, though they are the main output of many upland farms and of the limestone pastures in the extreme west of the Central Lowland from Clare through Galway to south Mayo and Roscommon.¹⁴

Irish agricultural activity may be summarised in the phrase, pastoral

⁹ The "pig cycle" is discussed in *British Agriculture*, an inquiry organised by Viscount Astor and B. Seeböhm Rowntree, pp. 215-218, London, 1938.

¹⁰ A full treatment of the Irish livestock production is given in O'Donovan, *op. cit.* in note 5.

¹¹ In 1942-1943, only 22 per cent. of the total agricultural output was exported; the value of this export was £19,173,000 as compared with £22,818,000 in 1939-1940 (*Irish Trade Journal and Statistical Bulletin*, vol. xix, p. 59, 1944). For the internal cattle trade, see O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, Arensburg, C. M., and Kimball, S. T., *Family and Community in Ireland*, pp. 23-30, London, 1940, and also the classic account by Hooper (note 3).

¹² *Statistical Abstract*, 1940, p. 87.

¹³ In addition to sources already mentioned, see *Irish Industrial Yearbook*, annual, Dublin.

¹⁴ Distribution maps are given in Stamp, L. D., *An Agricultural Atlas of Ireland*, London, 1931, and in Stamp, L. D., and Beaver, S. H., *The British Isles*, London, 1933.

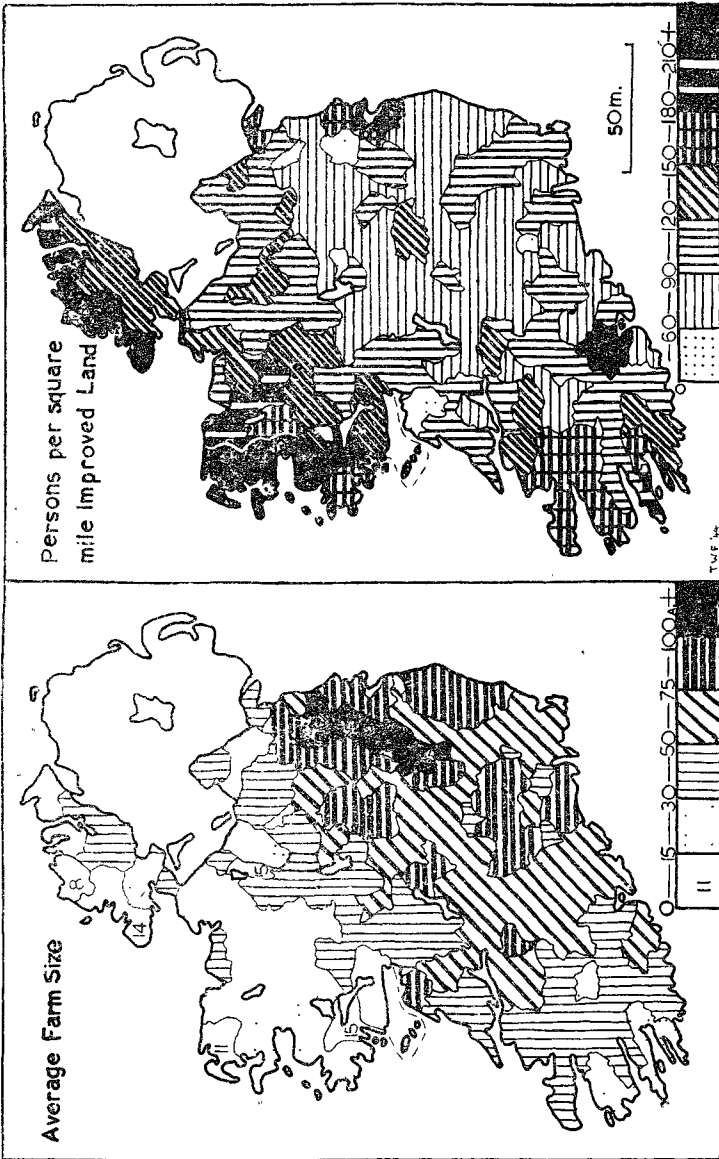


Fig. 1.—Average farm size in each rural district, 1936, rural population only, 1936.
 Fig. 2.—Persons per square mile improved land, rural population only, 1936.

Based on *Agricultural Statistics, 1927-1933*, Éire, Census, 1936, vol. i, pp. 30-130, and vol. ii, pp. 214-233.

production on a mixed farming basis, with the work done by a population one-third as numerous as in 1851. In spite of this sharp decline and all the attendant adjustments, the present distribution of population reflects the type of farming economy evolved in different parts of the country rather than the inherent fertility of the soil. The agricultural revolution of the past hundred years has brought changes in land use, such as the subdivision of many large farms and the creation of many small ones. Whether this would have been possible without heavy emigration is doubtful: if Éire had to support three times as many

people as it does now on the same area of land a return to subsistence farming would be inevitable over a large part of the country.

The Rural Population.

The rural areas of Éire are still reserves of manpower for the cities of Ireland and for other countries and will cease to be areas of emigration only when they are able to absorb the natural increase of population. Previous work has disclosed many anomalies in the rate of decline from one area to another, due in some cases to personal factors, or in others to the maintenance of seasonal labour and domestic industries.¹⁵ Land division accounts for increases in a few areas, but settlement schemes are necessarily restricted in scope. After more than seventy years of land re-distribution, there are now 256,000 farms, divisible into three classes, small, 1-30 acres, 136,000; medium-sized, 30-100 acres, 97,000, and large, over 100 acres, 23,000. Such a division as the smallholder, 1-50 acres, the "family" farm, 50-100 acres and the large farm of over 150 acres, suitable in Britain,¹⁶ would be meaningless in Ireland, especially as the general tendency is to provide farms of around 30 acres in such schemes as the re-settlement of people from the congested areas.

There is each type of farm in any part of Éire but the generalization involved in Fig. 1 reveals very clearly the spatial dominance of small, medium and large holdings.¹⁷ The extremes are seen in western Donegal and Mayo, where the improved land is divided into holdings averaging less than 15 acres, and in the belt of farms averaging more than 100 acres from Meath into Kildare. There are phenomenally high densities of population per square mile of improved land (see Fig. 2) in west Donegal and Mayo, with 440 in Dunfanaghy and 350 in Belmullet, though the agricultural resources include the use of moorlands that cover at least four times as large an area as the improved land; even so it is possible to discern at least signs of subsistence farming. The grazing and fattening farms of Meath and Kildare are mainly of considerable size and the average for Dunshaughlin r.d. is 168 acres. This rural district has a density of population of 47 per square mile of improved land, the lowest in the country. There is very little heathland and the valuation per head is £13 10s., ten times that of Belmullet or Dunfanaghy. Only 3 per cent. of the improved area was in crops in 1933 against 50 per cent. in Dunfanaghy. Obviously there is a complete contrast between the highly commercialised large-scale farming, with the purchase of feedstuffs, in Dunshaughlin, and an economy around Dunfanaghy little removed above the subsistence level. But in one important respect the two areas are similar, for each lost rather more than 10 per cent. of its population between 1891 and 1936.

These two extremes reveal the vital fact that adjustment by emigration bears no direct relation to the natural wealth of an area, though there is an obvious correlation between the size of farm and the density of population. Comparison of Figs. 1 and 2 shows that areas dominated by farms of 15-30 acres have at least 120 persons per square mile of improved land, while the large extent of the country with medium-sized farms most prevalent has chiefly 60-120 people to the square

¹⁵ Papers by Freeman, T. W., in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Donegal, vol. xvi, 1940-1941, pp. 31-47; Kerry and West Cork, vol. xvi, 1941-1942, pp. 28-43; Mayo, vol. xvii, 1942-1943, pp. 85-106; Sligo, vol. xvii, 1943-1944, pp. 254-268.

¹⁶ See *British Agriculture. op. cit.*, in note 9, pp. 357-361.

¹⁷ The data used in the preparation of Fig. 1 have also been mapped to indicate as far as possible the actual location of the farms in the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Ireland*, No. 2, Dublin, 1945.

mile. There are several exceptions, but the two distributions are generally complementary. The well-marked belt of large farms in Meath and Kildare is the nucleus of an area with farms averaging 50–100 acres bounded by an imaginary line from Dundalk to Lough Ree, along the Shannon to Limerick, but with an extension to Galway bay through Clare, and then southwards from the western boundary of Co. Limerick to Cork harbour. Beyond this lies the land of small farms that are of 30–50 acres near the Shannon and in Cork but of less than 30 acres

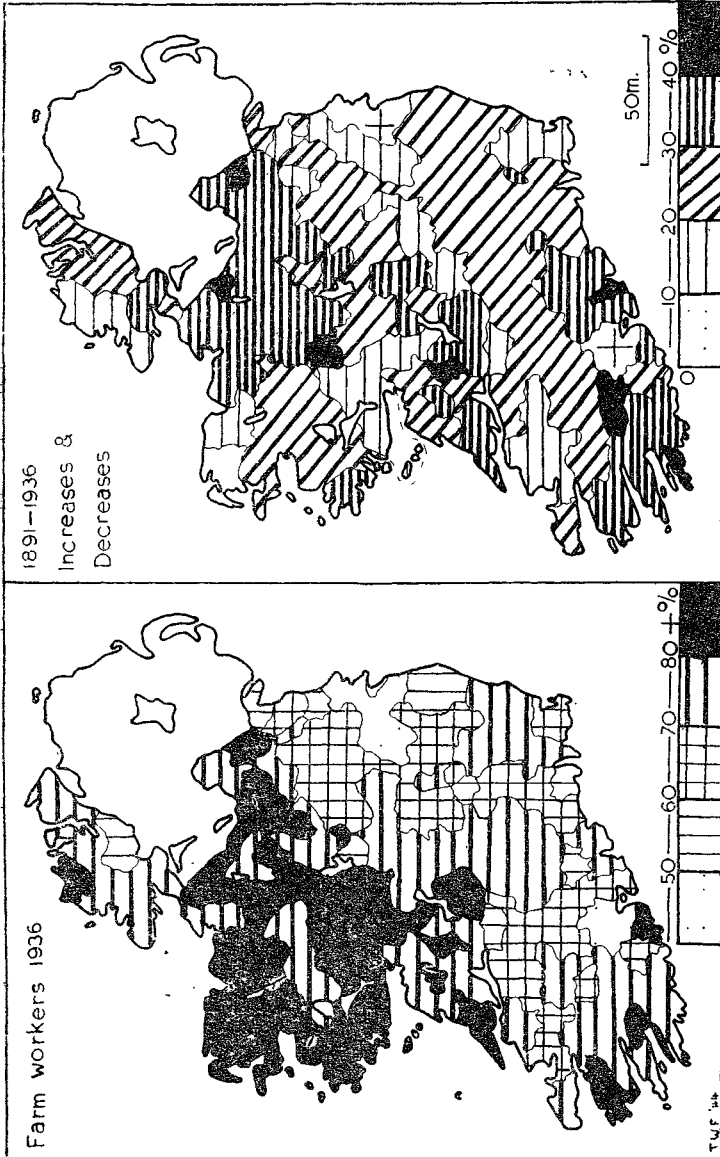


FIG. 4.—Rural population, decreases per cent., 1891-1936. Increases are recorded only around Dublin and Cork.

FIG. 3.—Percentage of employed population working on farms, 1936.

Based on Éire, Census, 1936, vol. i, pp. 30-130, vol. ii, pp. 132-165, and on Census of Ireland, 1891.

towards the seaboard as the soils become steadily more difficult to farm and the extent of uncultivated land more abundant. A similar transition is seen towards the boundary with Northern Ireland where there is a belt of densely-peopled country, with farms mainly of less than 50 acres, extending from Louth to Mayo where it passes into the even more closely settled west.

There are two Irelands, of which Dunfanaghy and Dunshaughlin are extreme rather than typical examples. But the ring of small farm country from Louth to Kerry feeds the area dominated by medium and large farms with young cattle that find their way through the Midlands to the pasture lands of Meath. Naturally there are local fattening areas in the outer ring and small farms within the remaining area; or again, not all the west has the minute farms of Donegal, Mayo and Galway, for Kerry and West Cork have far more medium-sized farms, notably in such areas as the Dingle peninsula. It could be argued that the distribution of the rural population is socially not unhealthy, for the small and large farms are essential to each other's prosperity.

The degree of direct dependence on agriculture (see Fig. 3) through the country bears a fairly close but inverse relation to the productivity of the land; the communities on the less fertile land with small farms have few people providing goods and services but those on larger farms in richer country support many more in personal service, transport and a variety of professions and trades. The close correlation of Fig. 3 with Figs. 1 and 2 will be noted. Dunshaughlin, with 61 per cent. on the land, is near one end of the scale and Clifden, Co. Galway, with 93.5 per cent. of the earning population on the land, at the other. There are several divisions with less than 60 per cent. of the employed population in agriculture but almost all of them are special cases of urban influence outside the boundaries of towns and villages. There are the expected anomalous conditions near Dublin and Cork, and also around Limerick, Waterford and a few smaller towns such as Dundalk and Athlone. The balance is also upset around Castlecomer, the one significant coalfield, with 400 miners employed in 1936. East Donegal, though the richest part of the county and therefore likely to have a high proportion of people providing goods and services, also has a number of textile workers among its rural population. But fusion of agricultural and industrial occupations in the countryside is rare in Ireland and the tourist developments so far achieved provide employment for only a limited number of persons.

The extent of population decrease is in the main a reflection of the lessened employing power of agriculture (see Fig. 4). During the past fifty years, nearly all the rural districts have shown a decrease of 20 per cent. to 40 per cent.: the increases around Dublin and Cork may be disregarded as obviously due to outer suburban developments. No direct correlation with wealth or poverty is possible, for West Kerry and West Cork have lost more heavily than West Mayo and West Donegal. West Donegal, however, has lost less heavily than East Donegal, the reverse of what might have been expected, and the small farm belt from Sligo to Louth has a decline as great as that of Kerry. But economic developments may help to explain rates of decline less than the average: the grazing areas of Meath and Kildare have decreases of less than 20 per cent. and the well-integrated creamery districts of Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and North Kerry show decreases that, though around 20 per cent., are much less than those of non-creamery districts in the west of Kerry and the south-west of Cork. It may well prove that these areas

are, at the end of a long period of population adjustment, approaching a condition of numerical stability.

Manpower on the Farms.

An analysis of the changing distribution of manpower on the farms suggests that the main sources of past and perhaps potential emigrants include labourers, the holders of small farms, especially those of less

TABLE I.—*Employment of labour on farms of different sizes, 1926 and 1936.*

	Size of Farms in Acres						Total
	1-15	15-30	30-50	50-100	100-200	over 200	
Farmers:							
1926	75,042	75,225	51,196	41,052	16,601	5,959	268,930
1936	62,734	73,058	53,730	43,140	17,517	5,834	259,112
<i>Per cent. change</i> ..	-10.5	-3.1	+5.0	+5.1	+5.7	-2.3	-3.4
Relatives:							
1926	61,539	72,504	55,035	47,860	19,895	6,149	264,096
1936	48,248	66,136	54,490	48,494	20,026	5,819	244,197
<i>Per cent. change</i> ..	-21.6	-8.6	-1.0	+1.1	+0.9	-5.2	-7.5
Labourers:							
1926	6,784	9,681	15,585	28,338	24,632	22,171	113,283
1936	4,018	8,182	14,330	27,194	23,817	19,600	102,669
<i>Per cent. change</i> ..	-40.8	-15.5	-7.7	-4.2	-3.3	-11.4	-9.4
Total Manpower:							
1926	143,365	157,410	121,816	117,250	61,128	34,279	646,308
1936	114,992	148,376	122,550	118,828	61,360	31,273	605,973
<i>Per cent. change</i> ..	-20.0	-5.6	+0.6	+1.4	+0.4	-8.8	-6.0
Relatives per 1,000 farmers:							
1926	880	966	1,078	1,163	1,198	1,050	985
1936	770	905	1,012	1,121	1,153	999	944
Labourers per 1,000 farmers:							
1926	97	128	329	689	1,473	3,715	422
1936	64	112	267	629	1,361	3,360	394
Relatives and Labourers per 1,000 farmers:							
1926	977	1,094	1,407	1,852	2,671	4,745	1,407
1936	834	1,017	1,279	1,750	2,514	4,359	1,333

NOTE.—This table deals only with those employed on farms and excludes a few thousand people engaged in forestry, gardening or as foremen, managers or otherwise. The number of labourers excludes those "out of work" at the time of the Census, i.e., 15,570 in 1926 and 19,357 in 1936. The "Totals" include workers on farms of undefined area and are therefore slightly greater than the sum of farms of different sizes. All workers in agriculture and very closely cognate occupations numbered 660,000-673,000 in 1926 and 630,000-645,000 in 1936, so it is quite clear that its employing power declined by c. 4-6 per cent. whatever the basis of assessment. Comparison of the various Census volumes will show that various figures are reached according to the classification employed. Much of the difficulty lies in the varied work of many labourers and at least some of the farmers.

Table based on Census Volumes, 1926, vol. II, Occupations, pp. 2-3, 228, vol. VI, Industrial Status, pp. 6-7; 1936, vol. II, Occupations, pp. 4-5, 233, vol. VI, Industrial Status, pp. 8-9. See also, General Reports, 1926, vol. IX, p. 27 and 1936, vol. IX, p. 36.

than 15 acres, and the sons and daughters of farmers. In the intercensal period, 1926-1936, 6 per cent. of all the workers in agriculture transferred to other occupations in Éire or in other countries. This figure is similar to the 5 per cent. decrease of population in the rural areas during the same ten years : the numerical loss was 179,000 allowing for the unabsorbed natural increase.¹⁸ The decline of 7,000 in the rural population between 1936 and 1941 should be added to the unabsorbed natural increase of at least 30,000 to give an emigration of nearly 40,000 still, as noted earlier in this paper, actively continuing.

The number of farmers in 1936 was 259,000, about half the number in 1870 when land redistribution under various Land Acts began its stormy career.¹⁹ In 1926 there were 269,000 farmers and the decrease of 10,000 lies mainly among those having less than 15 acres. Some of these farms must have gone out of cultivation altogether; as observations in various parts of the country suggest, while others have been added to larger farms or have been allocated by the Land Commission in various ways. One special case in Co. Mayo, to the west of the Moy estuary, which could not have succeeded without migration, within Éire in this case, was the re-allocation of 1,500 plots of land owned by 56 families into 32 compact holdings : the remaining families were removed to new holdings near Ballina or in Meath and Kildare under special settlement schemes.²⁰ Such extensive readjustments within the country are only possible in selected cases and emigration may prove a much easier remedy. There are, however, very clear indications that medium-sized and large farms are becoming steadily more important in the country, though the largest farms of all, those above 200 acres, are being shorn of their land for schemes such as those mentioned above. Assuming that the smallest farms, of less than 15 acres, will continue to decline in number and that the farms of more than 100 acres will survive through their economic usefulness, farms of 15-100 acres possess and will almost certainly retain their key position in the country's economic life. They now include two-thirds of all the farms in the country and provide work for two-thirds of the agricultural population.

The farmers of Éire have a diminishing army of helpers, as Table I indicates. There is a fall of 7.5 per cent. in the number of relatives and of 9.4 per cent. in the number of labourers against a decline of 3.4 per cent. in the number of farmers. Every type of farm employed less labour in 1936 than in 1926, the small farms 15 per cent. less and the others from 5 per cent. to 9 per cent. less : on the average, 1,000 farmers were assisted by 944 relatives and 394 labourers in 1936 against 985 relatives and 422 labourers in 1926. The chief difference between a labourer and an assisting relative is that the former is paid and the latter is not. Only on the large farms, as a group, does the number of labourers exceed the number of farmers and such paid assistance is almost unknown in many parts of the north and west, except on the small proportion of medium-sized and large farms. There are some seasonal and even permanent migration movements within the country that are very hard to assess numerically : in Leinster nearly 17 per cent. of all the agricultural labourers were born outside the county of residence,²¹ and there are

¹⁸ Freeman, T. W., *op. cit.* in note 1, p. 91.

¹⁹ Hooker, Elizabeth R., *Readjustments of Agricultural Tenure in Ireland*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1938, gives a full treatment of land tenure. According to Miss Hooker (pp. 23 ff.) there were 700,000 holdings in the whole of Ireland in 1870.

²⁰ *Irish Times*, Dublin, January 12, 1943.

²¹ Éire, *Census Reports*, vol. ix, 1936, p. 51.

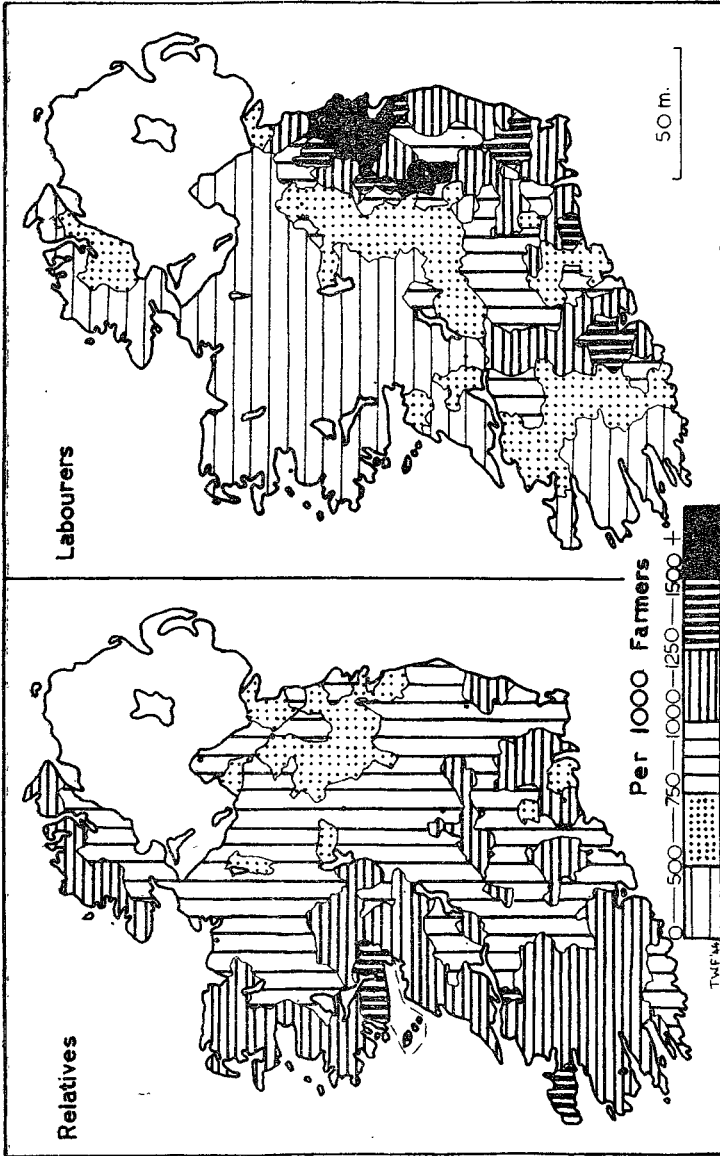


FIG. 5.—Relatives assisting 1,000 farmers, 1936. The number of relatives working on farms near the Atlantic seaboard is remarkably high.

FIG. 6.—Labourers per 1,000 farmers, 1936. This distribution is closely related to that shown in Fig. 1.

Based on Éire, Census, 1936, vol. ii, pp. 214-233.

annual seasonal movements from west to east Donegal, especially to the Lagan, and from West Kerry to Limerick, Cork and Tipperary. These movements are clearly a short-range variant of seasonal movement into Great Britain and may be merely the progenitors of permanent migration. But relatives may become labourers sharing in such movements and the holders of small farms are also likely to pass into the labouring class, which is mobile in its general reactions to economic opportunity. There are also many thousands of men, probably at least 25,000, not included among the farmers discussed so far, who regard themselves as primarily engaged in labouring, fishing or some other

occupation of a non-agricultural character, and yet possess small holdings of a few acres of land. All these groups figure very prominently among the actual and potential migrants, especially if they possess no land and are without family ties.

The distribution of labourers and assisting relatives over the country (see Figs. 5 and 6) is quite clearly a more complicated matter than the statistics in Table I would suggest. Most of the country has an average of 2-3 workers per farm, the only exceptions being an area with less than 2 workers per farm covering Sligo, Leitrim, East Mayo and most of Roscommon, and an area with more than 3 workers per farm including most of the Meath-Kildare large farm belt and a band of country extending from Dublin to Waterford along the coastal lowland, with an outlying area in the east of Co. Cork. The areas with the smallest farms have therefore not necessarily the minimum labour supply, largely because the amount of family labour employed is relatively considerable along almost the whole of the western seaboard with some extensions inland. Much of the family labour is employed on the medium-sized farms in these areas but there are many instances of a remarkably high proportion of family workers on even the smallest farms. In Table II attention is drawn to five districts dominated by small farms in which the amount of family labour employed shows sharp differences that may be correlated with the decline of population since 1891. If there are sources of supplementary employment available, such as local labouring, fishing, domestic industries, seasonal migration, the manpower on the land may appear remarkably high even though much of the energy of those

TABLE II.—*Number of farmers and assisting relatives working farms of different sizes in 1936, with decrease of population, 1891-1936.*

Rural District	A—Farmers B—Relatives B to A (A=1,000)	Size of Farms in Acres					Population Decrease % 1891-1936
		0-15	15-30	30-100	over 100	All	
DUNFANAGHY, Co. Donegal.	Farmers	1,849	281	181	19	2,330	13
	Relatives	2,005	341	274	19	2,639	—
	B to A	1,088	1,212	1,512	1,000	1,131	—
BELMULLET, Co. Mayo.	Farmers	1,700	302	118	60	2,180	6
	Relatives	1,752	348	154	82	2,336	—
	B to A	1,030	1,150	1,307	1,370	1,069	—
GALWAY, Co. Galway	Farmers	1,141	1,027	1,021	141	3,330	19
	Relatives	1,339	1,393	1,429	202	4,363	—
	B to A	1,171	1,358	1,392	1,500	1,311	—
SLIGO, Co. Sligo.	Farmers	1,238	1,344	825	75	3,482	33
	Relatives	851	1,162	707	56	2,776	—
	B to A	688	865	858	745	796	—
BOYLE II, Co. Sligo.	Farmers	566	944	552	33	2,095	40
	Relatives	365	777	528	26	1,696	—
	B to A	645	825	956	790	899	—

NOTE.—Comparison with Table I shows that the amount of family labour employed in 1936 on each size of farm was considerably above the average for Eire in Dunfanaghy, Belmullet and Galway, and well below the average in Sligo and Boyle. All the districts are dominated by small farms and few labourers are employed: Dunfanaghy, 210; Belmullet, 570; Galway, 412; Sligo, 941; Boyle II, 229; i.e., not more than one to every four farmers. But the amount of employment given on farms in Belmullet is high and the correlation with a low rate of population decline seems valid.

Table based on Ireland, Census, 1936, vol. II, Occupations, pp. 227-232.

recorded as working on the land is diverted elsewhere. But the relation to emigration is clear and it is interesting to observe that the comments of the Congested Districts Board inspectors about the attraction of migration in particular areas have been borne out by experience.²² The phrase "the young people emigrate to America before they are twenty-five" occurred constantly in the reports for Leitrim, Sligo, Roscommon and East Mayo, all of which are areas that have lost population at a heavy rate in the last fifty years.

The number of family workers (see Table I) is less on the largest farms in the country than on the medium-sized farms. This is brought out in Fig. 5 for the area near Dublin extending through Meath into Westmeath, where it coalesces with a quite different region in Louth and Monaghan having many small farms and a low aggregate of family labour. The migrant son or daughter from the larger Meath farm is not a labourer but a prospective entrant into professional life, commerce, or farming on his own account. The reliance on labourers is most complete around Dublin and in the Meath-Kildare belt, where some districts have an average of three per farm, and thence southwards to Waterford and also in East Cork. It is worthy of note that the area with at least 500 labourers to 1,000 farmers corresponds fairly closely with that having an average farm size of at least 50 acres, though there are interesting extensions of the area with 500 labourers to 1,000 farmers into the creamery districts of North Kerry and Central Cork, into Clare, and into East Donegal.

Some Demographic Problems.

Ireland is a law to itself demographically with three remarkable features that may be ascribed partly, if not primarily, to the influence of emigration—an excess of males in the population, a late marriage age (34 for men and 29 for women), and a high proportion of bachelors and spinsters at all ages.²³ Some of these features are found in other countries, but for reasons quite other than those relevant in Éire. A male excess is a feature of the population in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the Union of South Africa, all of which are or were until recently countries of immigration. In Éire the male excess was first seen in the province of Munster in 1891, in Connacht and the three Ulster counties in 1901, but in Leinster only in 1936.²⁴ It is a feature of the rural areas only: in 1936 there were 1,111 females per 1,000 males in the towns and 875 females per 1,000 males outside them. The demand for female labour in rural areas is less than the demand for male labour and the woman migrant has the choice of Irish towns or other countries. The disparity between the numbers of men and women became steadily more marked after 1926 as there was, up to 1939 at least, more demand for female than for male immigrants into Great Britain. But there are signs that the ratio is being equalised again, as there were 976 and 984 females per 1,000 males in 1941 and 1943

²² Congested Districts Board, *Base Line Reports*; Micks, W. L., *An Account of the Constitution, Administration, and Dissolution of the Congested Districts Board for Ireland from 1891 to 1923*, Dublin, 1925; comments on Clare in Arensberg and Kimball, *op. cit.* in note 11; Freeman, T. W., *The Congested Districts of Western Ireland*, *Geographical Review*, New York, vol. 33, pp. 1-14, 1943.

²³ Demographic problems are fully treated in the *General Reports* of the 1926 and 1936 Censuses.

²⁴ See note 1. The present tendency towards equalisation is due to several factors, many of which are likely to be of only temporary significance. There is a summary of the 1936-1941 changes in *Register of Population*, 1941, esp. p. xxiii.

respectively, against 952 in 1936.²⁵ It would be instructive to compare the proportions of men and women in rural Ireland with those in other non-urban areas of emigration in Great Britain: the present tendency towards parity in Éire, in so far as it is not due to very unusual conditions, is partly a reflection of the changing balance between country and town populations.

The late marriage age was noted by C. H. Oldham in 1913, who observed that only one in three of the women in Ireland between 15 and 45 years of age was married but "the young people in the rural parts are all intending migrants: they never think of marrying so long as they still hope to be able to emigrate."²⁶ The proportion of females unmarried in 1936 was very similar to that of 1911 and about one-quarter of those aged 45 and upwards were single. The number of bachelors at every age in Éire is substantially higher than in any other country and rather more than one-quarter never marry at all.²⁷ This tendency to delay marriage has become steadily more marked during the last hundred years but it cannot be ascribed solely to emigration as either a direct or indirect influence. The vast majority of those in the "assisting relatives" class remain unmarried and so do labourers and domestic servants living on farms. But many obscure social factors are of significance, such as the tendency of non-migrating members of families to remain with elderly parents, the lack of suitable farms for young couples to occupy, the presence in the community of many other single people and the diminishing readiness to accept standards of living that would have been willingly accepted even fifty years ago. However, Ireland still has a natural increase in population due to the high birthrate maintained—more than 19 per thousand: the average number of children under five per 100 married women under forty-five years of age in 1930 was 123, nearly 20 per cent. more than in Portugal, the closest competitor, and twice as many as in England and Wales.²⁸

Summary.

This survey of the rural population attempts to show the social sources from which the emigrating Irish are drawn and to assess some of the effects of such movement, but it is in no way a complete demographic analysis of the population. There are certain points of general significance:—

- (1) The marked fall in the rural population, apparently still continuing at a very moderate rate, has not resulted in a decline in agricultural output, and the farmers have shown a very considerable ability to adjust themselves to rapidly changing needs under the stress of war.
- (2) The redistribution of the land has strengthened the position of the holders of medium-sized farms, the only group now increasing in numbers. Some economic developments, and especially the creamery organisation, have been particularly successful among these producers. An element of stability may be recognised here that has proved, and may in future prove, antithetical to emigration on a large scale.

²⁵ Leinster had a small female excess in 1941—641,929 females to 622,836 males, i.e. 1,031 females to 1,000 males. See also note 24.

²⁶ Oldham, C. H., in *Oxford Survey of the British Empire*, ed. Herbertson, H. J., and Haworth, O. J. R., vol. i, p. 449, London, 1913.

²⁷ 1936 Census, vol. ix, General Report, esp. pp. 128-133.

²⁸ The net reproduction rate is discussed in Geary, R. C., "Irish Population Prospects," *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, vol. xvii, 1940-1941, pp. 91-112.

(3) The large farms, though reduced in numbers and in their capacity to employ labour, have maintained their position in the general scheme of agricultural production especially where it directly touches export and urban markets, notably Dublin. Around them the occupations of the community are less exclusively agricultural and the population is not now declining by emigration at a heavy rate.

(4) The farmers of very small holdings are emigrating more markedly than those of larger holdings, and are becoming a far less important element in the community as a whole. With them it is possible to group assisting relatives, and also labourers as people who, having little to leave, are likely emigrants, especially if unmarried.

(5) Female migrants predominate, partly because they are not needed on the farms so much as their brothers. Some find work elsewhere in rural Ireland, some in Dublin and other towns, but the vast majority leave the country altogether.

(6) There are three main types of migration (*a*) local movements, primarily seasonal, from one rural area to another; (*b*) into towns, chiefly Dublin, especially for women, and (*c*) abroad. But the whole of rural Éire is an area of net emigration and the movement into the towns is of minor numerical importance compared with that to other countries.

(7) It is difficult to accept the view that emigration from the rural areas is at or near its end—it cannot end until the rural areas absorb the natural increase—but the possibility of a labour shortage on the farms exists in at least some areas. But if the small farms are to be graded up to medium-sized farms, some reduction of population will almost certainly occur unless an extraordinary intensification and commercialisation of farming causes a very considerably increased demand for labour throughout the country.

DISCUSSION ON MR. FREEMAN'S PAPER.

Mr. J. M. Mogeey, N.I. Council of Social services: Mr. President, with your permission I should like to make a few remarks about the blank spot on Mr. Freeman's maps—that is about Northern Ireland. I have been working for some time now on the problems of the countryside on behalf of the Council I represent, and this question has naturally been considered.

The history of emigration from Ulster being rather earlier than in the other provinces. From 1780 onwards there was a stream of individuals and families moving from the ports of the North towards the New World. The countryside was one of small farmers and domestic workers in linen: often the one person combined the two jobs. Presumably these people were less attached to the soil by love of country than similar classes elsewhere, but from whatever reason, the evidence of considerable movement overseas is clear enough. The troubles of '98 swelled this tide. The Famine years, which set going large scale emigration from south and western Ireland, affected the North but not so severely as other parts of the country. Dependence on agriculture was not so complete and the decline in total population not so overwhelming. The population of the six counties now forming Northern Ireland stabilised itself around 1901 at a level of 25 per cent. below that of 1841.

The rural population has however declined consistently since 1841 and is still declining. This has been accompanied by a change in the

composition of the countryside which has had far-reaching social effects. The domestic industrial worker and the craftsman, such as the cooper, the carpenter, the saddler, the tailor and so on, have gone leaving the rural areas to farmers and farm labourers with the minimum of essential auxiliaries, *e.g.*, the postman and the road sweeper. Furthermore, agriculture has increased the average size of its unit farm and the business has become increasingly mechanised, so that a smaller labour force is required.

I have prepared some maps to show the areas of Northern Ireland which lost heavily in population during the intercensal period 1926-37. This shows quite clearly a movement away from the hill margins; the abandonment of farms above 600 feet in Ireland is a commonplace observation and this valleyward drift has been commented on not only in Ireland but in all the countries of Europe and even in eastern U.S.A. This map also shows that in some cases areas which have good fertile land have been losing population at the same high rate as the hill foot zone. There is an apparent correlation between these areas and poor transport facilities but it would be rash at this juncture to connect up these two factors as cause and effect.

In the course of work in the field, I have collected family histories from over 1,000 families showing where the brothers and sisters of husband and wife and where their own sons and daughters, are now living. The figures for two areas in Co. Fermanagh tended to confirm the suggestion of a connection between internal population drift by transport and to a lesser extent by physical features. There was hardly any movement across the Lake to the north of the county—Co. Fermanagh is, as you know, divided almost in half by Lough Erne. The local county town and other non-industrial towns attracted few people—the majority went to Belfast, if they stayed in the country at all. Of course, you must remember, I speak only of those who moved away from home—up to three-quarters of the population stayed in the district. There was an interesting difference in final destination between travellers from the two generations. The “husband’s or wife’s” generation went abroad to Canada or the U.S.A. for the most part, the second generation largely born since the last war went to England or Scotland, many of them in the last few years to war jobs in Great Britain.

I have enjoyed Mr. Freeman’s paper on the broader issues of emigration from Ireland and should like to be joined with the proposer and seconder of the vote of thanks to him for his work on this and other problems of rural Ireland.

Dr. Geary : Mr. Freeman’s paper is interesting and useful but in commenting on it I suffer from the disadvantage that I am professionally over-familiar with much of his statistical matter. Nevertheless, I recognise that for the framing of policy studies on the lines of Mr. Freeman’s are a prime necessity.

The country is, in fact, badly in need of a lead in demographic policy and it is natural that it should look to the Society for such a lead as it has been the Society’s proud distinction in the past wisely to guide public opinion. It is an advantage that emigration has not been the subject of political controversy. Actually, there seems to be general agreement (even if the agreement is largely apathetic) on the Government’s policy in regard to emergency emigration, that if a job cannot be found for a man or woman they must be allowed to emigrate. Is this to be the attitude during peace-time ?

We must disabuse our minds at once of the idea that emigration from Ireland is a "surplus" phenomenon. Citation of a very few figures of a type already much quoted in official reports will tend to show that it is the determining element in the level of population, and it is very much more subject to control (if control be found desirable) than births and deaths. On the 35 years' experience prior to 1936, of 1,000 males and 1,000 females aged 13 there remain in the county only 535 males and 507 females at age 34. As an example for a particular county: in County Mayo, of 1,000 males aged $12\frac{1}{2}$ in 1926 there survived in the county only 547 aged $27\frac{1}{2}$ in 1941; the corresponding figure for females was 561, figures which surely are indicative of an instinct to migrate which is bred in the bone. Emigration from Ireland is different in kind and in degree to that from any other country in the world. It is my conviction that if the right policy be adopted towards emigration all our demographic problems (including those of education, juvenile unemployment and perhaps the low marriage rate, though this is more doubtful) and many of our economic problems will automatically tend to adjust themselves.

A friend once remarked that the two attitudes towards emigration are represented by two songs, "I'm sitting on the stile, Mary," or "I'm off to Philadelphia." Which song does the country prefer? A choice should be made, and soon.

Mr. Freeman thanked the various speakers for their comments and said that another paper would be needed to cope with all the problems raised in the discussion. In general, he agreed with Mr. Meenan that Éire had now, and possibly in the future, a surplus of men and women, a feature shared with parts of Scotland, Wales, rural France and some Alpine valleys. There were also possible comparisons with Northern Ireland, and especially with those areas in Tyrone and Fermanagh that lay nearest to Leitrim and Cavan. In reply to Dr. Kennedy it was pointed out that many of the statements in the paper were hedged around with subjunctives. The whole question of migration policy, mentioned by Dr. Geary and other speakers, was linked with the wider problems of the place of agriculture and industry in Éire. Already there had been over-emigration from some rural areas, as for example on a large farm in the north of Co. Dublin where, owing to an unexpected death, an acute labour problem had arisen. Nor was this necessarily an isolated instance. An intensification of farming might be achieved in some cases; in England it had been done with the aid of various government schemes, such as the provision of tractors and seeds, and by the use of additional labour drawn from unusual sources and available in wartime only. Any substantial increase in the arable acreage in Ireland must connote an increased demand for labour. But if the experience of the inter-war period was to be repeated, and if there was to be an agricultural slump, all the trends of the special war years, such as the increase in arable cultivation and in total production, would be reversed. It yet remains true that in Éire agriculture is the basis of the country's wealth, though it is unlikely that men will be found to farm land in remote places at high altitudes, far from shops and amenities that everyone expects to use. On the industrial side, it might be possible to develop manufactures such as canned meats, which have been greatly appreciated in England during the present war. Obviously the most natural development is in industries closely allied to agriculture. Mr. Mogeey, of the

Northern Ireland Council of Social Service, a most welcome visitor to the Society, raised valuable points worthy of fuller exposition. The heavy outward movement from areas of prosperous farming was also seen, on a long-range view, in Éire, notably in Co. Meath. The movement from areas of isolation was worthy of close investigation in Éire on a detailed regional basis. So far, the most puzzling anomalies had been revealed: in 50 years, areas apparently similar in resources lost population at strangely different rates.